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To: The TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) Hearing Committee,

I am writing to add my voice and story for your consideration respecting the effectiveness of the TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) program in WA state. I am a 33 year old mother of one 16 month old boy. My pregnancy was not planned and fell in the end of my junior year at the University of Washington.

My son's father and I had ended our romantic relationship after an unsatisfactory two years of dating, only to find that we had conceived a child after our break-up. I was unsure of his involvement, and he is not a good provider. After taking a hard look at my financial reality, I decided to apply for food stamps. Following my visit to the Capitol Hill Community Services Office (CSO), I was encouraged to apply for TANF assistance as well.

Because I was in college, and then due to my child's age, I was left alone to focus on raising my baby and finishing school. I am pleased and proud to report that I earned my Bachelor's Degree in Comparative History of Ideas in December, 2009. Throughout my pregnancy and the first twelve months of my son's life, I complied with all requirements to receive ongoing assistance from TANF. Some of these requirements were embarrassing, degrading, and insulting.

For example, to "prove" that I was attending class, I was given attendance sheets to have signed by each of my college professors on a daily basis. I can not understand how infantilizing adult women serves in their best interest. From my personal experience, single moms and poor moms are some of the most hard-working, under-respected, and least supported people in our city. The rules of TANF only encourage the continued marginalization of an already underserved and struggling population.

Now that my son has reached an age considered appropriate by "Work First" to enter daycare, my continued financial support via TANF will only continue if I find DSHS compatible full-time daycare arrangements, whether or not I am working full-time. The guidelines for all inclusive daycare for all babies aged twelve months and older is not designed with the child's, mother's, or family's best interest in mind.

According to TANF, the mission statement it promises is to "provide assistance to needy families so that **children can be cared or in their own homes, or in the homes of relatives**". This is a beautiful thing. As a poor working mom, the only thing I *can* give my son is the love and nurturing he deserves from being cared for by people who

honestly have his best interest at heart. Throughout college, my son's father, grand-father, and close family friends were the only people I trusted to provide loving, safe, and supportive daily care for my child. To deny that now is going against all of the love and time our family has invested in producing a valued member of society.

My continued success in the TANF and Work First programs seem tenuous, at best. I have worked, and continue to work part-time as a self-employed contractor. I would be working more and making more money if there was more work to be had. This country is in the midst of a huge economic crisis, and I am not relaxing at home with my TANF funds each month. I am working as a contractor, raising my son, looking for work, and have been a full-time student for the past four years. TANF has the capacity to actually provide me with a leg up, so that I can be a success and stay out of the welfare system, but instead it is designed to make failures the norm.

By forcing involvement into daycare (TANF) and requiring that I "sign in" to the Work First office every day (within a certain one-hour time frame), feelings of subjugation are the natural end result. Averaging out my monthly TANF grant by 35 hours per week (the required minimum hours to "be looking for work full time"), the pay scale is under \$1.00 per hour. Not only is this illegal under state law, but it also violates American's rights under the Thirteenth Amendment which states:

"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction".

By use of financial control, TANF directly contradicts my rights as a free individual and the rights of my child. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families only provides the promise of help. The strings attached go beyond an acceptable measure, nor do they make economic sense. The state will pay for my daycare provider, which is certainly much more costly than my TANF allowance. The state will pay for the continued operation of Work First offices, but they are understaffed, unproductive, depressing modes of control.

As far as I'm concerned, the grant provided by TANF is like wearing an electronic cuff, essentially making me a ward of the state. It dictates where my child spends his day and where I spend mine. If this is the image of a governmental program success, I would hate to see a failure.

I do not mean to come across as ungrateful or hateful. I am very grateful for the help I have received from TANF and am nervous about my economic future without it. However, the system is not designed to work. A drastic overhaul could save millions of dollars and uphold the mission statement TANF set out to fulfill: to provide funds for needy families so that children may be cared for in their homes or those of relatives. It is simple. It can work. But it is simply not working.

Sincerely,
Meg L Krukonis